

The effective management of teachers' habitual tardiness: Protecting scheduled teaching time

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Abstract

Teachers' habitual tardiness poses the most problem to school managers anywhere in the world and has countless drawbacks. It is one of the main anomalies that have beset many South African public schools, deplorably substantial emphasis has been given to teachers' absenteeism. Espousing a qualitative research approach, coupled with multiple case study design, this enquiry aimed to explore how School Management Teams (SMTs) effectively manage teachers' habitual tardiness and come up with strategies to protect scheduled teaching time. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews and the review of documents. Data was analysed with the employment of Inductive Thematic Analysis (ITA) method embedded within the moral leadership framework. The purposefully selected sample comprised seven SMT members from three public secondary schools in Soshanguve township, South Africa. The findings revealed that habitual tardiness by same teachers is a problem in all the three schools, whereby missing the first period was a daily occurrence. The findings further painted a bleak picture on the scheduled teaching time that is lost and usually unaccounted for. To effectively manage habitual tardiness, school managers are advised to implement and monitor the tardiness attendance register. It is further recommended that a roundtable discussion be held amongst basic education stakeholders for the introduction of the biometric log-in system. To protect scheduled teaching time, the streamlining of the school timetable is proposed.

Keywords: *habitual tardiness, management, scheduled teaching time, South Africa*

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1. Introduction

Teachers' habitual tardiness to school is one of the main anomalies that have beset many South African public schools. It has become a culture in greater part of schools to be lenient with time (Tylor, 2016). Undesirably, tardiness is eclipsed by absenteeism that is easily observed by the school leaders and adequately researched by the scholars. Teachers' tardiness is a misconduct that seem very petty but have grim effects on school endeavours, moreover when it becomes habitual. Hence, it has become an imperative administrative obligation of principals to manage habitual tardiness of teachers (Onoyase, 2018). Section 3(2) (a) of the South African Employment of Educators Act, (EEA, 1998), and Chapter A, subsection (4.2.1) of the South African (Personnel Administrative Measures, (PAM, 2022), as amended, compels all teachers to be at school during the formal school day, which should not be less than 7 hours per day, except for unusual purposes and with the preceding authorisation of the principal. Unequivocally, occasional tardiness can be exempted in some cases when the reasons are convincing and beyond the teacher's control (Chujor, 2014). Accordingly, scheduled teaching time should be always protected, and be spent vigorously interacting with learners regarding curriculum pursuits. The adherence to these prescriptions will be achieved when teachers' habitual tardiness is appropriately and effectively managed by the School Management Team.

The study of Adegunju et al. (2019) involving Nigerian elementary school teachers alluded that teachers' habitual tardiness poses the most problem to school administrators anywhere in the world and has countless drawbacks. Persistent tardiness to school may not only affect the academic performance of learners, but it could also generate grave difficulties for the teachers, such as suspension and dismissal, if not monitored (Matthew & Omotayo, 2020). To demonstrate, a government primary school teacher in India was suspended on charges of being habitually tardy to school in Cuddalore district (Nadu, 2019). In confronting the challenges posed by teachers' habitual tardiness, (Karamperidou et al., 2020) launched the "Time to Teach" research project in eight countries and territories in the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) region such as the Comoros, Kenya and United Republic of Tanzania, Zanzibar, with the primary objective of identifying factors affecting various forms of teacher attendance, which include being punctual and being in the classroom. In most countries under study, teachers who received their salaries on time tend to be more punctual and less frequently absent from school, affirming that the nature of employment affect attendance.

Based on a survey involving 93 schools in South Africa, Taylor (2016) argued that teachers as adult role models give a bad example of the significance of timekeeping, and degenerating lesson time destabilises the value of teaching and learning and therefore the ambition of the school. The report further revealed that teachers bunk school more often than children, 52.7% of teachers arrive late, and 45.2 % are late for class after break. Results from the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) report (2013) portrayed a dreadful situation in which in more than half of Further Education and Training (FET) phase schools sampled and more than 98% of senior phase schools sampled teachers were always and often arriving late at school. Such statistics are alarming given the limited scheduled teaching time that is prescribed by the national Department of Basic Education (DBE). Moreover, most teachers argued that they never have enough time to reach every learner, particularly the ones that are below grade level (NEEDU, 2018). Meanwhile, the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (2012) advises stringent learning schedules and set assessment targets, which necessitates effective use of time by learners and teachers (Maile & Olowoyo, 2017).

It is imperative for the SMT to protect the scheduled teaching time by implementing effective strategies that will halt teachers' habitual tardiness. Regrettably, Hompashe (2018) revealed that there are principals who seemed to have no strategy to deal with teachers' late-coming. Mampane (2013) and Butakor and Boatey (2018) call for the investigation of teachers' tardiness to class. Although several scholars have examined the problem of teacher tardiness to schools, there is scant literature which can help school leaders towards effective management of teachers' habitual tardiness (Matthew & Omotayo, 2020). Hence, it is the aim of this enquiry to explore how the SMT can effectively manage teachers' habitual tardiness and come up with strategies to protect scheduled teaching time. This enquiry endeavours to fill the void and hubs on the three secondary schools situated within Soshanguve township, in Pretoria, South Africa. The study questions were probed on the effective ways of managing teachers' habitual tardiness from principals, deputy principals as well as departmental heads since they all constitute the SMT within the South African basic education sector. This enquiry purports that teachers' attendance is affected by the nature of employment, because temporary teachers are easily discharged from employment, and private schools can easily terminate teachers than public schools. Therefore, dealing effectively with habitual tardiness, may primarily curb the escalation to chronic tardiness, and ultimately spare the authorities the

engagement in long tedious processes of eliminating permanently employed teachers in the public schools.

2. Research Background

Maile and Olowoyo (2017) define habitual tardiness to school as a repeated act of arriving at school after the official hour of commencement of the day's teaching and learning responsibilities. They viewed it as a contravention of the principle of punctuality, and further argued that, ordinarily, if not checked at the inception, it breeds a bad habit with the individual involved and may have negative consequences. The most undesirable consequence in a school milieu is losing scheduled teaching time that is in utmost instances not recovered (Abadzi, 2009). On the other hand, scheduled teaching time is the amount of time during a formal school day allowed for active instruction (teaching) in the vital (academic curriculum) subjects (EEA, 1998, Section 3 Paragraph 2). It is the core responsibility of the teacher to engross in class teaching, thus, any absence from school means that the teacher affected is not satisfying this core duty as preserved in the (EEA, 1998, Section 4 Paragraph 5e). Any absence from school within the context of this enquiry incorporates tardiness, since some teachers may be present in school but nowhere to be seen inside the classroom, thus failing to accomplish the obligations of amongst others, protecting the scheduled teaching time. As a consequence, the concepts; 'habitual tardiness' and 'scheduled teaching time' were operationalised in this study.

Teachers' habitual tardiness is an escalating nuisance and has become progressively problematic. The smooth running of educational institutions gets disrupted when it is not effectively managed. It damagingly impacts the total classes that the teacher must attend. It affects learners' academic progress since the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) may not be completed by teachers wandering aimlessly during the scheduled teaching time. A three-collaboration study by the South African Human Sciences Research Council, Stanford University in the United States of America, and the University of Botswana elevated a major alarm with teachers bunking lessons with unspoken union authorisation as a major cause of learners' poor academic performance (Macfarlane & Chaykowski, 2011). To this end, insufficient enquiries have been conducted to establish strategies to effectively manage teacher's habitual tardiness with none attempting to address the protection of scheduled teaching time in South Africa.

Substantial emphasis has been given to teachers' absenteeism with little focus to teachers' habitual tardiness. Yet habitual tardiness by teachers has far-reaching consequences, even when it appears less severe. When teachers persistently miss some minutes of teaching daily, accumulatively at the end of the term or school year a huge disservice would have been incurred by the learners, and the school community at large. Therefore, the current enquiry seeks to fill the ascertained lacuna, and to efficiently address the aim, the resulting research questions were shaped.

1. How is the gravity of teachers' habitual tardiness in schools?
2. To what extent teachers' habitual tardiness affect scheduled teaching time?
3. What strategies can be implemented to effectively manage teachers' habitual tardiness?

3. Literature Review

There is nascent research showing that tardiness of teachers to school is a global phenomenon (Matthew & Omotayo, 2020). Several studies, though limited, have attempted to guide school leaders on how to manage teachers' habitual tardiness (see; Sansaluna-Maulana et al., 2021; Matthew & Omotayo, 2020; Butakor & Boatey, 2018; Kasu, 2014). In the studies conducted by Matthew and Omotayo (2020) and Butakor and Boatey (2018) in senior high schools in Ghana and public schools in Ondo State Nigeria, respectively, the scholars advised that there should be regular supervision and monitoring of teachers' habitual tardiness by school administrators. They noted that the use of teachers' attendance register, class attendance register, and teacher's permission book will assist in achieving this. They further suggested that these documents can be monitored daily to determine the attendance pattern of teachers to class. The usage of such documents is applicable to the South African context since there is no available technology such as biometrics log-in systems in all the public schools. There is an over-reliance on documents to monitor habitual tardiness that has become a recurring issue. Moreover, there are no designated Human Resource personnel to specifically deal with habitual tardiness, it remains the responsibility of school administrators who are often overwhelmed given the varying priorities of respective schools. In a separate study by Hompashe (2018) on Eastern Cape province teachers in South Africa, some principals cited the signing of the school attendance register as effective in promoting early arrival by teachers. Hence, all the documents monitoring tardiness should be strictly controlled, and the frequency

of monitoring should be intensified for its success as accentuated by (Butakor & Boatey, 2018). On the contrary, Taylor (2016) and Kasu (2014) cautioned against the over-reliance on attendance registers because such documents are often manipulated by employees and instead suggested the acquisition of a biometric log-in system, for either face or fingerprint recognition to capture accurate times. A system that was mooted by Angie Motshekga, the former South African Minister of Basic Education.

Speaking at a post State of the Nation Address media briefing, Motshekga revealed plans to replace manual attendance registers for teachers at schools with a biometric log-in system (South African News Agency, 2013). A proposition that has been vehemently rebuffed by some of the teacher unions, though it would appear that the developed countries are extremely advanced in the use of the system (Gelb & Clark, 2013). The effective management of teachers' habitual tardiness may be realised when the SMT works towards a common goal, that includes amongst others, the protection of the scheduled teaching time. In the view of Butakor and Boatey (2018), this may be achieved when habitual late comers and truants are identified and counselled to refrain from such conducts and work toward improving their academic performance. Moreover, Nadu (2019) and Kasu (2014) inferred that habitual tardiness by teachers was linked to students' academic performance. In response to the challenges faced by the largest part of under-performing public schools, in April 2017 the former Minister of Basic Education commissioned NEEDU to carry out research that seek to explore the features of top-performing schools in South Africa. The findings divulged that the most common feature of the high-performing schools is the effective use of scheduled teaching time (NEEDU, 2018). This signifies the urgent need for the protection of scheduled teaching time, particularly in schools where academic performance is at the lowermost.

In maximising teaching and learning time and minimising lost time, NEEDU (2018) cautioned schools about the indicators of losing a significant amount of time. They reported on the following; 1) learner and teacher late-coming, 2) teachers leaving school early for a variety of reasons including attending union meetings and memorial services, and cultural and sporting events, and 3) teachers and learners returning to class late after break or down-time between lessons. Guarding against these and other indicators of losing scheduled teaching time may help restore the culture of punctuality, but requires decisive leadership, where moral leadership is required. While Gustafsson (2017) alluded to teacher habitual tardiness as a problem in 96% of South African historically deprived schools and 36% of historically

privileged schools, effective management of teachers' habitual tardiness may benefit all stakeholders within the school community. For example, Maile and Olowoyo (2017) purport that teachers' punctuality, regular school attendance and well-prepared lesson will also motivate the learners to come to school early. Holding the similar view, Sansaluna-Maulana et al. (2021) and Wijesiri (2015) asserted that the teaching practices in terms of punctuality and attendance of the teacher may help learners expand a more positive attitude about educational outcomes, which could help them to facilitate learning.

There is no justification for persistent and habitual late-coming. Teachers also have a role to play in stamping out this scourge. It is for this reason Matthew and Omotayo (2020) urged teachers to be self-disciplined, be committed to the job, as well as shun acts capable of undermining the discharge of their duties, such as engagement in private business and domestic affairs, before coming to school. Teachers' habitual tardiness is a managerial problem; it reflects the type of leadership overseeing an institution. In a 'laissez fair' environment, where teachers persistently arrive late, scheduled teaching time is usually compromised. This is substantiated by Tinab (2014) noting that both absenteeism and tardiness are indicative of education systems that have feeble teacher management structures. Corroborated further by Hompashe's (2018) report where one principal described how he had to lock the gate so that teachers and learners who were late remained outside for some time; a genuine reflection of the lack of leadership, competency, and strategies to be employed by some school leaders in dealing with tardiness. This is against the backdrop of the legislations in place (i.e., EEA of 1998; South African Council of Educators Code of Professional Ethics Act of 2002) that give authority to school principals to handle misconduct cases. Conversely, the unionised permanent teachers involved in habitual tardiness may escape punishment when school administrators follow unfair labour processes when addressing the phenomenon, besides it being categorised as a less serious misconduct. Principals are too fearful whilst subordinates act with total impunity (Taylor, 2016). Therefore, the adoption of the moral leadership model, as a framework to be put into operation by the SMT remains imperative in the restoration of lost scheduled teaching time due to teachers' habitual tardiness.

4. Theoretical Framework

The moral leadership model by Burns (2007) was used in this enquiry. The model presumes that the critical focus of leadership ought to be on the values, beliefs, and ethics of leaders themselves. Put differently, the model emphasises that those in leadership position should be exemplary and carry themselves in a principled and decent manner. A view sustained by Fairholm and Fairholm (2009) maintained that it involves “setting example for others about the rightness or wrongness of particular actions”. Moral leadership seeks to shape not behaviours but values and beliefs (Burns, 2003), and using the language of transformation, punctuality amongst teachers may get better. Thus, Spector (2019) emphasises that moral leadership attempts to convert those who hold contrary values, and based on the aims of this enquiry that relates to encouraging late-comers to protect scheduled teaching time by being in good time for work, and arrive in time in their classroom.

West-Burnham (1997) deliberates two methods to leadership, which may be classified as ‘moral’. The first labelled as ‘spiritual’ relates to “the recognition that many leaders hold what might be called ‘top level’ standpoints.” Leaders within the context of this enquiry refers to the SMT, who hold the responsibility of ensuring that teachers’ habitual tardiness is effectively managed. Moreover, the SMTs actions shape the experiences within the school, directly and indirectly, giving form to the climate, culture and, ultimately, the community, (Burns, 2007). The second category is ‘moral confidence’, the capacity to act in a way that is consistent with an ethical system and is consistent over time. In this regard, the SMT and the teachers are expected to be punctual at all times. The model put emphasis on the modelling of good and disciplined behaviour by the SMT to effectively manage teachers’ habitual tardiness before it filters down the learners.

Burns model seemed fitting for exploring how the SMT can effectively manage teachers’ habitual tardiness and come up with strategies to protect scheduled teaching time. It puts squarely the responsibilities of leadership on the shoulders of the SMT because this is the structure that can make or break the school. The SMT is expected to act as moral agents (Burns, 2007) in creating and upholding the schools’ culture and climate in which punctuality is encouraged continuously. In any undertaking, leadership is a moral task, more especially for the SMT. The SMT need to demonstrate firstly to teachers, and subsequently to learners that “it is possible to live one’s values and advocate for a responsible society” (Berreth & Berman, 1997). After all, moral leadership is defined as “a leader’s behaviour that demonstrates superior

virtues, self-discipline, and unselfishness” (Cheng et al., 2004). Therefore, Burns model was opted to analyse the findings of the enquiry, and was employed throughout to demonstrate how values, beliefs, and ethics of the SMT may convert the misconduct of habitual tardiness by the teachers.

5. Research Methods

5.1 Research Approach

This enquiry espoused a qualitative research approach. The utilisation of this approach permitted an in-depth comprehension of the participants' replies and a thorough grasp of the stakeholders' sights on the effective measures that may be applied to manage teachers' habitual tardiness. Leedy and Ormrod (2019) describe qualitative research as a multi-method approach to research which concentrates on a phenomenon as happening within a studied population. In applying this approach, data was collected through examination of teachers' attendance registers, class attendance registers in addition to face-to-face interviews with the principals, deputy principals and the departmental heads of the respective schools. The triangulation permitted the confines from each method to be transcended by relating outcomes from dissimilar viewpoints, as emphasised by Campbell et al. (2020).

The interviews were conducted at the participants' various settings, where they were comfortable and able to respond to all the questions brought forward. The participants' experience as members of the SMT ranges from three to ten years, rendering them data rich. Their contributions and understandings to the challenge under scrutiny were valuable for this enquiry. The research questions were directed at the effective ways of managing teachers' habitual tardiness. All the questions asked were responded to by all the participants, and the interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. Through the participants' signed consent, all interviews were audio recorded for the protection of all valuable data. All the activities occurred after permission to conduct the enquiry was requested and granted by the Department of Basic Education. Moreover, participants were given assurance of anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the enquiry as and when they feel the need to cease.

5.2 Research Design

Research design is “a systematic plan for a research project including who to integrate in the research, who or what to compare for which dimensions” (Flick, 2014). A multiple case

enquiry design was found suitable and adopted based on its huge benefits. Gustafsson (2017) points out that with multiple case study, the investigator is able to examine data within each situation and across distinct situations. This provided the investigators with the opportunity to accumulate data from participants of three different schools; schools have various management compositions and types with a different figure of personalities (Gabuza, 2015). Furthermore, it allowed the investigators to have a greater understanding of the explorative subject of teachers' habitual tardiness, as endorsed by (Gustafsson, 2017).

5.3 Sampling

Through the purposive sampling technique, seven SMT members from three secondary schools were selected, two principals, two deputy principals and three departmental heads to understand the discrepancies and the resemblances between the schools as opined by Gustafsson (2017) and Leedy and Ormrod (2021). The elements of the enquiry were chosen from the target population for inclusion in the sample as maintained by Nwaigwe (2022) for the reason that the SMT is responsible for the smooth running of the school under the leadership of the principal, and this includes managing tardiness and absenteeism among other obligations.

5.4 Data Analysis

This enquiry used Inductive Thematic Analysis (ITA) as a data analysis method and the NVivo as the qualitative data analysis software. ITA involves reading through textual data and identifying and coding emergent themes within the data (Byrne, 2021). Utilising the process promoted by Braun et al. (2019), the transcription of initial data was executed and continually read by the two authors objectively for the production of initial codes. Subsequently, the themes that best explain the role of SMT's were identified and refined. Out of this process, three themes emerged and were prudently revised on numerous occasions prior to reaching the outcome. One theme was fragmented into three subthemes and are the hub of the recounted outcomes. The subthemes correspond with each other, and together they communicate a narrative about the effective management of teachers' habitual tardiness. After agreeably thematically arranging data in detail, the final analysis was done embedded within the moral leadership framework.

6. Findings and Discussion

The present enquiry exposed numerous challenges faced by the SMT in effectively managing teachers' habitual tardiness, and the detrimental effects of lost scheduled teaching time. The participants also attempted to bring forward the strategies of minimising the nuisance of teachers' habitual tardiness, although some of the principals appeared despondent and helpless. As a result of the engagements, the subsequent themes emerged; teachers' habitual tardiness is problematic, habitual tardiness negatively affects scheduled teaching time, and strict monitoring by school managers. The participants' viewpoints are indicated by the letter 'P' and the number, for example, "P1," trailed by their abbreviated ranks, as follows; Principal (PR), Deputy Principal (DP), and Departmental Head (DH).

Theme 1: Teachers' habitual tardiness is problematic

The findings revealed that most of the participants acknowledged habitual tardiness as a serious problem. When probed about the seriousness of the problem the following was revealed. Accounts of the narratives include:

"Teachers' habitual tardiness is a very serious problem., there are teachers who come to work late, including some departmental heads." (P6, DH)

"It's bad because it makes the learners to follow the leader by also coming late... remember the fish rots from the head." (P5, DH):

"Teachers' habitual tardiness is worse now." (P3, DP):

"Teachers' habitual tardiness is rampant in my school." (P7, DH)

It is deduced that habitual tardiness is indicative of lack of discipline, and it is this behaviour that compounds the problem. Regrettably is further aggravated by some SMT members who have a core responsibility of assisting the principal in curtailing the problem. Evidently revealing the absence of moral leadership by the SMT, demonstrated by the lack of capacity to act in a way that is consistent with an ethical system and is consistent over time. A proposition that is aligned with the findings by Matthew and Omotayo (2020) urged teachers to be self-disciplined, be committed to the job. However, it is argued that such will be observed when teachers model good behaviour more especially in front of the learners, and this speaks to consistently arriving on time.

The two principals who participated in the enquiry downplayed the problem of teachers' habitual tardiness, whilst acknowledging that it is happening in their respective schools. This is what was disclosed by P2, PR:

"Teachers' habitual tardiness in my school is not that rife, its manageable but what I have noticed is that same teachers that are coming late, are forever late. Same culprits all the time".

P1, PR added:

"We do not have a serious tardiness problem in my school. Only few teachers come late to school and sign the attendance register 15 minutes later after the rest have signed".

It is contended that, for as much as there are teachers who are coming late to school, without valid reasons, there is a problem. It therefore becomes a bigger problem when the same teachers are habitually late. The aim of this enquiry was not to quantify the problem of habitual tardiness but instead to seek solutions to manage and ultimately curb it, therefore, the question of 'only few teachers are late' does not stand. Furthermore, it may be concluded that when tardiness is not effectively managed it becomes habitual. Each time a teacher is late for class, the whole group is left unsupervised, and this is against what the DBE policies stipulated. The vacuum creates an opportunity for various social ills to infiltrate the teaching and learning spaces. Habitual tardiness by same teachers is a problem in all the three schools under inquiry. As unveiled, by appraised literature, teachers' tardiness has an effect in learners' academic achievement, by further creating knowledge gaps. Based on the framework underpinning the enquiry, the SMT is expected to act as moral agents (Burns, 2007). As a consequence, SMT led by the principal, need to confront the habitually tardy teachers, and ensure that scheduled teaching time is protected at all costs.

Theme 2: Habitual tardiness negatively affects scheduled-teaching time

Despite the two principals playing down the nuisance of teachers' habitual tardiness, the findings of this enquiry paints a bleak picture on the teaching time that is lost and usually unaccounted for. All other participants from the three schools consented to habitual -tardiness that disapprovingly affects scheduled teaching time. A habitually tardy teacher who misses 20 minutes in the morning daily, its 100 minutes per week, which is 8 hours a month, or 3 days

per term. The cumulative effect of habitual tardiness shades a bad picture of absenteeism. In affirming the negative effects of habitual tardiness, P5, DH drop the following:

“Scheduled teaching time is greatly affected; it affects and disrupts school business. In a habitual form, the disruption trickles down to learners. If the teacher, habitually comes to school late, the learners will do the same”.

P1, PR concurred:

“the scheduled teaching time is badly affected, instead of teaching 60 minutes, a teacher teaches for 40 or 50 minutes, or even less”.

P3, DP also reiterated the displeasure and confirmed that:

“Lessons start late, and the first period is not covered at all. The ATP will be affected; content will be compressed to cover the lost time. The slow learners may not cope at all.

In conclusion, P2, PR is in accord:

“it affects scheduled teaching time in a big way. When you are late, your period suffers. Even those who are early they often deploy some delaying tactics before they go to class. Those who are late don’t usually attend the first period and it becomes a habit”.

From the deliberations, it is construed that habitual tardy teachers consume scheduled teaching time extensively, leading to inadequate syllabus coverage. Moral leadership attempts to convert those who hold contrary values (Spector, 2019) such as encouraging habitually tardy to protect scheduled teaching time. The first period is the mostly affected and it can be argued that the period after break may also be affected given the lackadaisical nature of some of the teachers. Sadly, the most affected people are the learners. Missing the first period is a daily occurrence as established by the enquiry, and this may lead to other social-ills to enter the classroom when learners are left unattended. Teachers should engage the learners at all times and discharge the responsibility of teaching and learning. Moreover, evidence has emerged that confirmed the benefits of the effective use of scheduled teaching time (NEEDU, 2018).

Theme 3: Strict monitoring by school managers

The following propositions were brought forward and are discussed as sub-themes.

Effective application of policy measures. Empirical data revealed the willingness of school managers to address the nuisance of teacher late-coming. They call for the existing measures to be strengthened and implemented impartially. Suggesting on what should be done to minimise late-coming, P4, DP highlighted that:

“We need to address the situation early and refer to a tardy policy”.

Presenting a parallel view, P5, DH voiced the following:

“Most policies are well known and documented. The problem that negates the full implementation of these strategies, is lack of commitment and consistency by the SMT. Policy implementation should never be biased against certain teachers,”

The views expressed by the participants are in line with what has been established in the policies such as EEA (1998) and PAM (2022) are deemed adequately fit to meet the challenge of late-coming and absenteeism amongst others. However, as further confirmed by the review, led down by weak teacher management structures. It is therefore argued that it is the responsibility of the school managers to ensure that the existing DBE policies are upheld in a steadiness manner, where all the late comers are held accountable. SMT members should refrain from operating in fear and confront the challenge of late-coming. Since grounded on the moral leadership framework, they are duty-bound to demonstrate superior virtues, in particular encouraging punctuality. By so doing, scheduled teaching time may be protected.

Introduction of the biometric log-in system. The implementation of such a system is the function of the DBE to support school managers in effectively managing late-coming. The participants are in support of such a system, and they have these to say;

“The top management can use the biometric system to monitor punctuality in the workplace. It is accurate and fair. (P6, DH)

A stance that is supported by P7, DH who stressed that:

“Those who are regular late comers should be strictly monitored. The log-in system should be introduced”.

The reviewed literature from the developed countries supports the utilisation of the biometric log-in system (Gelb & Clark, 2013). However, South Africa being an exceedingly unionised country, the current government is unable to implement such a system due the majority unions’ pressure. This has left a gap that is exploited by some of those employed in the basic education sector since electronic, accurate arrival and departure times cannot be recorded.

Effective use of punctuality monitoring documents. Based on the studied literature and the context of this enquiry, punctuality monitoring documents include teachers Attendance Register and Class Attendance Register. Majority of the participants agreed that when documents are effectively used late-coming may be curtailed. Hence P7, DH suggested the effective use of all the punctuality monitoring documents. However, P6, DH presented a contrasting view and cautioned that:

“Time registers can be used though not effective due to lack of consistency”.

A view that is upheld by Taylor (2016) and Kasu (2014) who warned against the over-reliance on attendance registers since such documents are often manipulated by employees. P4, DP is in accord and confirmed the following:

“Late-comers often indicate incorrect arrival times that deem them early.”

Such conduct calls for the SMT to set example for teachers about the rightness or wrongness of committing such misconduct, as enshrined within the moral leadership framework (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2009). To counter this unethical and unprofessional behaviour, when probed, P3, DP said:

“We must implement and monitor late-coming register and ensure that teachers sign in front of the manager, give leave forms once late coming time covers the stipulated hours.”

A view that is sustained by P1, PR who proposed that...

“Keep on calculating all the minutes that the teacher is late and issue them with the leave form when it makes 7 hours.”

Skeptical of the leave form issuing strategy, P2, PR said:

“Teachers have made late coming fashionable, a culture, and there are those who come early but never in class on time. Even if you apply punitive measures like counting the number of minutes missed and giving them a leave form.... all those strategies I have implemented and have failed. Instead, teachers will be claiming to be victimised, I’m also looking for strategies to curb late-coming”.

The lack of strategies by the participant presents a frustrated figure and a call for help, and further resonates Hompashe (2018) findings. As a consequence, the implementation of late-coming register may give an impetus in the issuing of leave forms since accurate late arrival times will be captured under the supervision of one of the senior managers. In addition, P1, PR highlighted that:

“The late coming register will assist us to identify and analyse the trend, call the teacher every week after analysis and caution them about the danger of being habitually late”.

The late coming register is a legitimate document and therefore should be treated as such. For it to be effective in addressing the nuisance of late-coming, the human component in the figure of school managers should be hands on, and not take the back seat and expect documents to solve all the problems encountered.

Analysed Documents

This section presents findings from documents analysed from the two schools, and given that participation was voluntary, the principal of the third school did not participate, hence documents from their school could not be accessed. Guided by the research ethical principles, documents were accessed upon request and availability. As a result, the following punctuality monitoring documents were accessed, the Attendance Register and Class Attendance Register. It has to be emphasised that the reviewed documents were manual and based on the 2022 records.

Attendance register. The attendance register confirmed the trend of habitual late-coming. Common names were highlighted in colour indicating late arrival. In the two schools, the late arrival time is after 7:30 in the morning. However, habitually tardy teachers indicated punctual times even when their names were already highlighted in colour, further confirming what literature and the findings of the enquiry revealed. No evidence was found on whether these permanently employed culprits were reprimanded or terminated further raising concerns on the schools' organisational culture and decision making in maintaining teachers' discipline. Such findings give more ground to the utilisation of a specific register for the habitually tardy teachers and the biometric log-in system. The attendance register is a formal document that need to be completed with authentic information and it is the principal's responsibility to maintain.

Class attendance register. Two weekly registers were analysed per school, specifically focusing on the first period and the period after break. The documents gestured a generally good class attendance record that also includes habitually late teachers, contrary to what was revealed by the teachers' attendance register. This document appeared to be ineffective and unreliable because it is manned by the learners in both schools and both principals acceded to that. Above all, it is not the responsibility of the learners to monitor teachers' class attendance, it is a managerial responsibility. This has presented another inconsistency in the protection of scheduled teaching time.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In a quest to explore how the SMT can effectively manage teachers' habitual tardiness and come up with strategies to protect scheduled teaching time in three secondary schools, the findings revealed that most of the participants acknowledged habitual tardiness as a serious problem. It is deduced that being habitually tardy to school is indicative of lack of discipline, and it is this behaviour that compounds the problem. It was also established that habitual tardiness by same teachers is a problem in all the three schools under enquiry. Despite the two principals playing down the nuisance of teachers' habitual tardiness, the findings of this enquiry painted a bleak picture on the teaching time that is lost and usually unaccounted for. All participants from the three schools consented to habitual tardiness that disapprovingly affects scheduled teaching time. It is construed that habitually tardy teachers consume

scheduled teaching time extensively, leading to inadequate syllabus coverage. Missing the first period is a daily occurrence as confirmed by the enquiry, and this may lead to other social-ills to intrude into the classroom when learners are left unattended. Furthermore, it is therefore argued that it is the responsibility of the SMT to ensure that the existing DBE policies are upheld in a steadiness manner, where all the tardy teachers are held accountable. SMT members should refrain from operating in fear and confront the challenge of habitual tardiness. By so doing, scheduled teaching time may be protected. Majority of the participants agreed that when punctuality monitoring documents are effectively used, tardiness in all forms may be curtailed.

To effectively manage habitual tardiness, particularly where there is unavailability of technology, school managers are advised to implement the tardiness attendance register. The first register should be removed when the reporting time has lapsed. The second one meant for tardy teachers should be signed and monitored in the office of the principal or deputy principal so that accurate times are recorded. Moreover, the findings revealed that some of the departmental heads are also tardy for work. By so doing, the habitually tardy individuals will be easily identified and dealt with when the monitoring is consistent and unbiased. Principals need to confront the habitually tardy teachers and ensure that scheduled teaching time is protected without fail. A roundtable discussion should be held amongst basic education stakeholders for the introduction of the biometric log-in system. A common ground must be reached since this will also assist in correctly capturing leave days. A more effective tool is needed to monitor teachers' class attendance, and in the absence of none, strict measures should be implemented by SMTs to prevent lost teaching time during the first and the period after break. To operationalise this strategy, the streamlining of the school time-table is proposed, whereby no single SMT member is featured on the time-table during the first and the period after break for monitoring purposes.

Late coming constitutes misconduct, and it is the principal's responsibility as the sole accounting officer to the basic education ministry to ensure that the culture is stopped. However, it is the collective responsibility of the SMT to ensure that the ethos and the policies of the DBE are always upheld. This includes effectively managing teachers' habitual tardiness and protecting scheduled teaching time. The implications for the SMT and all the relevant stakeholders are that the completion of syllabus coverage will never be accomplished despite the DBE providing ATP's that clearly indicate the amount of time to be spent on the teaching

of all the subjects in schools. Secondly, the quality of teaching and learning will be compromised leading to poor academic results, that may further translate to matriculants failing to acquire necessary university entry requirements. Thirdly, parents may move their children to functional schools where education is prioritised. Teachers' habitual tardiness may also spill-over to learners' tardiness resulting in a chaotic and dysfunctional schools. The policy on absenteeism and tardiness should be enforced without fear or favour. This will be attained when those in leadership are exemplary, model good behaviour and always punctual. For change to be attained, the SMT need to be encouraged to take tough action on badly-behaved teachers. Effective teaching and learning will take place when scheduled teaching time is utilised to the optimum and this will only happen when teachers are punctual for work, arrive in time in their classroom to teach, and ensure that teachers refrain from delaying going back to class after break time.

The effective management of teachers' habitual tardiness need to be further studied because it has the potential of becoming chronic. As far as it can be ascertained, this study remained as one of the very few, which focused on helping school leaders towards effective management of teachers' habitual tardiness within the South African setting. However, due to a relatively small group of participants utilised, it is suggested that large-scale and comparative follow-up studies should be done to determine the capacity of SMTs in eliminating the challenge.

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